

Jallianwala Bagh: Hundred Years of Sacrifice

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Today, on April 13, 2019, is the hundredth year of Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It was the day of Baisakhi festival. Thousands of male, female and children had come to Amritsar from nearby villages and towns. Many of them had camped in Jallianwala Bagh's open ground. There was an atmosphere of tension in Punjab due to the agitation organized to oppose the infamous Rowlett Act. The public and police forces had clashed in Amritsar three days before of the Jallianwala Bagh incident. In the protest against police suppression, on April 10, 5 British people murdered and mischief with Miss Sherwood was reported. The Congress leaders Dr. Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew had been arrested. A public meeting was organized in Jallianwala Bagh in the evening where resolutions were sought to release the arrested leaders and withdraw the Rowlett Act. General Reginald

Edward Dyer (who was called to Amritsar by the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Michael Francis O'Dwyer) directly ordered the soldiers to open firing on the gathering without any proclamation or warning. There were 15 to 20 thousand Indians present in the meeting. Among them 500 to 1,000 people were killed and thousands were injured. After firing, General Dyer refused to take the injured to the hospital for treatment saying that this was not his duty! Martial Law was not applicable in Amritsar on April 13. The Martial Law was imposed three days after the massacre, in which the British government heavily oppressed the public.

The eyewitnesses, historians, and administrative officials have analyzed the "duty" played by General Dyer from various perspectives and angles - starting from Dyer's racial hatred towards Indians to his psychiatric disorder. The British government constituted Hunter Commission for investigation and the Congress also set up its probe committee. The Army Commission was also set up in England to investigate the role of General Dyer. Dyer's action of direct

firing was discussed in England's lower and upper houses also. Although the majority in the Lower House rejected Dyer's action but the majority in the Upper House was in favor of Dyer. The *Morning Post*, a newspaper in England, collected around 30,000 Pounds for Dyer in recognition of his services to the Empire. The British in England and British officials in India mostly acclaimed Dyer as the protector of the 'Raj'.

Jawaharlal Nehru has written in his autobiography that while returning from Lahore to Delhi by train, he himself heard General Dyer telling his military companions that he did precisely what he ought to do on April 13, 1919. General Dyer was returning in the same compartment after giving testimony before the Hunter Commission. General Dyer, in his every testimony and conversation, had justified his action without any sign of regret or remorse. There are indications that he even said that if he had more ammunition and soldiers, he would have taken more strict action. It seems that if Dyer had been able to carry the two armored cars with built-in guns, which

could not be taken inside the Jallianwala Bagh due to the narrow road, the scale of the massacre would have been enormous!

Based on Hunter Commission's report and other evidences, General Dyer was removed from his military post and barred from further employment in India. Dyer, who was born in India, returned to England and died on 24 July 1927 from illness. Revolutionary Udham Singh shot and killed Michael O'Dwyer on March 13, 1940 at Caxton Hall in London, as he had pledged just after the massacre. Udham Singh did not run away from the spot. He was arrested and hanged on July 31, 1940. Udham Singh was raised in an orphanage. He was admirer of Bhagat Singh and advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity. It is said that while living in the orphanage, he had named himself *Ram Mohammed Singh Azad*.

After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi returned their titles of 'Knighthood' and 'Kesar-e-Hind'. After this incident, the Indian Independence Movement entered the new

phase. After three decades of strong struggle and sacrifices, the country got Independence. However, the ruling class of India has not been able to keep that Independence safe. Instead, it has pushed the country into the slavery of neo-imperialism. Now only 'communalism, casteism, dynastic rule, individualism and *Englishism* are the basic contents which have been left in the name of 'free India'. Under the leadership of this very ruling class, the people of India are sneering to each other to grab maximum share in neo-imperialist loot of the country. It is being proudly told by the ruling class that this is the 'New India', which should be admired by everyone and flourished at all costs!

In such a situation there is no need for centennial celebrations of sacrifice made at the Jallianwala Bagh. The need of the hour is to restore the anti-imperialist spirit and to keep it ignited. So that the sacrifices of the martyrs should not be in vain. In this direction the Socialist Party will organize some programs throughout the year beginning from today. The participation and

support of all fellow citizens would be expected.

Salute to the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh!

*(The author teaches at Delhi University and
is president of Socialist Party)*